



HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

Testimony :: Dan Mariaschin

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Mr. Chairman,

I would like to thank you for the privilege of addressing this hearing on behalf of B'nai B'rith International and its more than 110,000 members and supporters.

As a member of the U.S. delegation to the OSCE's Vienna conference on anti-Semitism last year, and as an advisor to the U.S. delegation in Berlin, I am encouraged by what I feel to be the many positive developments that have resulted from these OSCE-sponsored gatherings.

The Berlin conference was long overdue. With the exception of the Vienna meeting in 2003, and a brief seminar on the subject hosted by the European Union earlier this year – both of which helped place anti-Semitism on the world “radar screen” – no collective body since 1945 has met to discuss, and act, on hate crimes committed against Jews.

What we have seen in Europe over the past decade has been a series of meetings, the adoption of legislation, and the creation of commissions and committees on Holocaust-era restitution issues. But nothing so coordinated or prioritized regarding anti-Semitism has been attempted.

Compounding the problem has been the “blinders-on” view of many European leaders about the demonization of Israel and Zionism, which has become a pernicious – and regularly-accepted – form of modern-day anti-Semitism. Rather than characterize, for example, the comparison of Israel to Nazi Germany, or violent acts against Jews and Jewish communal properties as outright anti-Semitism, the initial reaction of some leaders to these acts was dismissive, with many ascribing such incidents or portrayals as “legitimate criticism of Israel, or as the “pranks” of disaffected youth. This has been especially true when such acts were carried out by individuals from the growing Arab and Muslim communities in countries like France and Belgium.

It was therefore of particular note that the historic Berlin Declaration, which provided a blueprint for combating hate crimes against Jewish individuals and institutions, specifically addressed the growing problem of anti-Semitic attacks being committed by opponents of Israel's policies toward the Palestinians. The passage stating that “international developments or political issues, including those in Israel or elsewhere in the Middle East, never justify anti-

Semitism” should be a wake-up call to those who try to justify hate crimes with politics.

But while the demonization of Israel has now been broached in an international forum, the parameters of the problem have not yet been defined. European leaders will need to summon the political will and courage to acknowledge the dangers of anti-Israel hatred and to act forcefully against it. This means recognizing that anti-Israel sentiment is growing fastest among Arabs and Muslims, in the Middle East and in Europe – a realization that, until now, European officials have not been swift to achieve.

Another major issue at the Berlin conference was the matter of how best to monitor acts of anti-Semitism, Europe-wide. While the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) serves as the OSCE’s own monitoring arm, it has not carried out any kind of systematic process of gathering accurate data on anti-Semitic acts in the OSCE member-states. For there to be any coordinated approach to combating the phenomenon, one needs to have factual information on what is happening, and where.

ODIHR’s involvement in this effort is indispensable, and it must be provided with the necessary funding to begin this information- and data-gathering process. And yet, even on this question, some member-states initially balked, citing budgetary concerns or doubts as to whether national governments could demand such information from provinces or states.

To capitalize upon the progress made at the Berlin conference, OSCE member-states should immediately begin to implement their own recommendations. Some of these proposals include an informal exchange of “best practices” between nations; government support for anti-hate programs; assistance in facilitating the prosecution of anti-Semitic crimes; and the promotion of academic exchange and educational programs.

Furthermore, there must be follow-up in the areas of legislation; law enforcement; education; media; and general monitoring of anti-Semitic hate crimes. Progress in these spheres will require a continuation of the collaborative effort of friendly countries and NGOs in order for the promise of Berlin to be realized in a serious way. Education ministers and justice ministers, for example, should regularly meet in multilateral forums to develop an ongoing form of cooperation on matters related to anti-Semitism and hate crimes. And as OSCE member-states create legislation, they should call on the experience of NGOs – many of whom met the day before the opening of the OSCE plenary and agreed on their own highly detailed proposal to combat anti-Semitism – to assist them in this effort.

U.S. lawmakers have provided important leadership in these areas and their ongoing efforts should be strongly encouraged. Mr. Chairman, you in particular are to be applauded for introducing the Global Anti-Semitism Review Act of 2004, which would require the State Department to report on acts of anti-Semitism around the world; Senator Voinovich, much to his credit, has introduced the companion bill in the Senate. Representatives Cardin and Hastings should also be commended for their active involvement in the Berlin conference and for their substantial contributions to the cause of combating global anti-Semitism, through their participation in the OSCE process.

Another action the OSCE could take to elevate the problem of anti-Semitism on the organization's agenda would be to appoint a special representative to deal with the issue. This official, appointed by and working closely with the OSCE chair, should have the prestige, the profile, and the resources to bring the OSCE's influence to bear in addressing the problem.

Finally, the OSCE should strongly consider a third special plenary on anti-Semitism next year. Some countries resisted the idea of a second meeting. But at least one country, Spain, has extended an offer to host a gathering in 2005. Such a session might well take the form of an experts' conference, or might otherwise differ from the previous two gatherings in its objectives or focus. For example, such a meeting might address the importation of anti-Semitism from the Arab and Islamic world to Europe.

Mr. Chairman, as the OSCE prepared to convene the Berlin conference, the French government reported a steep rise in anti-Semitic incidents since the beginning of this year – nearly double the number in the first quarter of 2004 as in the last quarter of 2003. Just this month, a 17-year-old Talmud student was stabbed in a suburb of Paris by a man who screamed, “God is great!” in Arabic. Also in recent weeks, rabbis in Marseille and Creteil were attacked, and a rabbi's son was severely beaten in Paris over the holiday of Shavuot. Meanwhile, in Hungary five months ago, 5,000 right-wing demonstrators rallied outside a Budapest radio station, chanting, “Dirty Jews.” And in Germany's Berliner Zeitung last month, an editorial cartoon derided Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz by comparing him to a controversial political science professor at the University of Munich; it is well known in German society that both men happen to be Jewish.

Such episodes are painful reminders of the urgency of the problem we continue to face. As we gauge our progress in the struggle against anti-Semitism, let us draw reassurance from the positive atmosphere of the Berlin conference, but let us also commit ourselves to sustaining the forward momentum of that gathering. Sixty years after the Holocaust, and nearly four years after the start of the current rise of anti-Semitism in Europe, let us embrace one of the central messages of the Berlin conference: that complacency and passivity in the face of anti-Semitism can no longer be tolerated.

Thank you.